

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. Software for use on a client device that is configured for communications with at least one remote source of advertisements via a communications network, comprising:

- an advertisement download function that downloads advertisements from the at least one remote source, during one or more advertisement download sessions;
- an advertisement storage function that stores the downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client device;
- an advertisement display function that effects display of at least selected ones of the stored advertisements on a display associated with the client device;
- an obscured ad monitor function that determines whether an obscured ad condition has occurred, whereby the obscured ad condition occurs when an advertisement currently being displayed on the display associated with the client device is being obscured by one or more other items currently being displayed on the display; and
- an obscured ad nag function that generates an obscured ad nag display in response to detection of the obscured ad condition, wherein the obscured ad nag display notifies the user of the obscured ad condition.

2. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the obscured nag display will be generated upon each future occurrence of an obscured ad condition.

3. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the at least selected ones of the stored advertisements when the client device is offline.

4. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the user has the following choices:

- remove whatever is obscuring the obscured advertisement;
- maintain the status quo, so that every future occurrence of an obscured ad condition will result in the generation of the obscured ad nag display; and
- switch the operating mode of the software from a first operating mode to a second operating mode, wherein the second operating mode has less features than the first operating mode.

5. The software as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the user has the following choices:

- remove whatever is obscuring the obscured advertisement;

4 maintain the status quo, so that every future occurrence of an obscured ad condition  
will result in the generation of the obscured ad nag display; and

6 switch the operating mode of the software from a first operating mode to a second  
operating mode, wherein the second operating mode has less features than the first operating  
8 mode.

2 6. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the communications network is the  
Internet.

7. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is e-mail software.

2 8. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the at least one remote source is  
operated by a vendor of the software.

2 9. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the software is subsidized by  
revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

2 10. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the at least one remote source  
comprises an advertisement distribution server system that is operated by a vendor of the  
software in order to distribute advertisements to clients of the vendor for the purpose of  
4 subsidizing the software.

2 11. The software as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the at least one remote source  
comprises an advertisement distribution server system that includes:

4 at least one ad server which stores at least one of a plurality of advertisements to be  
downloaded; and

6 at least one playlist server which stores at least one playlist each of which contains a  
list of the plurality of advertisements to be downloaded, and the address of the ad server  
where each listed advertisement is stored.

2 12. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the at least one playlist server is  
controlled by a vendor of the software.

2 13. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the at least one ad server  
comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store one or more advertisements to be  
distributed to the client device.

14. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein:

2 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software;  
the at least one ad server comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store one or  
4 more advertisements to be distributed to clients of the vendor of the software; and  
at least one of the plurality of ad servers is controlled by the vendor of the software.

15. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein:

2 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software;  
the at least one ad server comprises a plurality of ad servers that each store one or  
4 more advertisements to be distributed to clients of the vendor of the software; and  
at least one of the plurality of ad servers is controlled by an entity other than the  
6 vendor of the software that has granted the vendor of the software and its clients access to its  
ad server(s).

16. The software as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the software is compatible with a  
2 plurality of e-mail service providers.

17. The software as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the software is not tied to a  
2 particular e-mail service provider.

18. The software as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the software is operational across a  
2 plurality of different e-mail systems.

19. Software for use on a client device that is configured for communications with a  
2 multiplicity of other client devices via a communications network, the software comprising:  
an e-mail composition function for enabling a user of the client device to compose e-  
4 mail messages;  
an e-mail send function that enables the user to send e-mail messages to other client  
6 devices via the communications network;  
an e-mail receive function that enables the user to receive e-mail messages from other  
8 client devices via the communications network;  
an advertisement download function that downloads advertisements from at least one  
10 remote source, during one or more advertisement download sessions;  
an advertisement storage function that stores the downloaded advertisements on a  
12 storage medium associated with the client device;  
an advertisement display function that effects display of at least selected ones of the  
14 stored advertisements on a display associated with the client device;  
an obscured ad monitor function that determines whether an obscured ad condition  
16 has occurred, whereby the obscured ad condition occurs when an advertisement currently

being displayed on the display associated with the client device is being obscured by one or more other items currently being displayed on the display; and

an obscured ad nag function that generates an obscured ad nag display in response to detection of the obscured ad condition, wherein the obscured ad nag display notifies the user of the obscured ad condition.

20. The software as set forth in Claim 19, further comprising a communications function that effects a send e-mail communication link between the client device and an e-mail service provider server system via the communications network whenever the user desires to send e-mail messages, that effects a receive e-mail communication link between the client device and the e-mail service provider system whenever the user desires to check for received e-mail messages, and that effects an advertisement download communication link between the client device and the at least one remote source via the communications network, whereby the advertisements are downloaded from the at least one remote source via the advertisement download communication link.

21. The software as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the at least one remote source comprises an advertisement distribution server system that is controlled by a vendor of the software.

22. The software as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the communications network comprises the Internet.

23. The software as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the e-mail service provider system comprises a first e-mail service provider server system for storing and forwarding outgoing e-mail messages, and a second e-mail service provider server system for storing and forwarding incoming e-mail messages.

24. The software as set forth in Claim 23, wherein the first and second e-mail service provider server systems are the same.

25. The software as set forth in Claim 23, wherein the first and second e-mail service provider systems are separate.

26. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the software is e-mail service provider-independent.

27. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function  
2 controls the display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad display parameters  
prescribed by the at least one remote source.

28. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function  
2 effects display of the at least selected ones of the stored advertisements when the client  
device is offline.

29. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function  
2 effects display of the at least selected ones of the stored advertisements while the user is  
composing and/or reading e-mail messages.

30. The software as set forth in Claim 21, wherein the advertisement display function  
2 controls the display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad display parameters  
prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system, which ad display parameters are  
4 unknown to the e-mail service provider.

31. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein each advertisement download  
2 session is limited to a prescribed maximum time duration.

32. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement download  
2 function further includes an ad fetch timer function that limits each advertisement download  
session to a prescribed maximum time period.

33. The software as set forth in Claim 20, wherein:  
2 the send e-mail communication link and the receive e-mail communication link can be  
the same communication link or different communication links; and  
4 the advertisement download communication link is not the same communication link  
as either the send e-mail communication link or the receive e-mail communication link.

34. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisements comprise  
2 advertisement files each of which includes an image.

35. The software as set forth in Claim 34, wherein the advertisement download  
2 function downloads separate portions of a single advertisement file over two or more  
advertisement download sessions.

36. The software as set forth in Claim 34, wherein each image comprises one of a GIF image, a PNG image, and a JPEG image.

37. The software as set forth in Claim 35, wherein each image comprises one of a GIF image, a PNG image, and a JPEG image.

38. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the stored advertisements in a sequential manner.

39. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the stored advertisements in a random manner.

40. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the stored advertisements in a linear sequence according to the order in which the advertisements are stored on the storage medium.

41. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the stored advertisements in an order prescribed by the at least one remote source.

42. The software as set forth in Claim 20, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the stored advertisements in accordance with ad display parameters prescribed by the at least one remote source.

43. The software as set forth in Claim 42, wherein the ad display parameters are unknown to the e-mail service provider.

44. The software as set forth in Claim 42, wherein the ad display parameters are prescribed by a vendor of the software.

45. The software as set forth in Claim 44, wherein the ad display parameters are unknown to the e-mail service provider.

46. The software as set forth in Claim 21, wherein the advertisement distribution server system and the e-mail service provider server systems do not communicate with one another.

47. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the obscured nag display will be generated upon each future occurrence of an obscured ad condition.

48. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the advertisement display function effects display of the at least selected ones of the stored advertisements when the client device is offline.

49. The software as set forth in Claim 19, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the user has the following choices:  
remove whatever is obscuring the obscured advertisement;  
maintain the status quo, so that every future occurrence of an obscured ad condition will result in the generation of the obscured ad nag display; and  
switch the operating mode of the software from a first operating mode to a second operating mode, wherein the second operating mode has less features than the first operating mode.

50. The software as set forth in Claim 47, wherein the obscured ad nag display further notifies the user that the user has the following choices:  
remove whatever is obscuring the obscured advertisement;  
maintain the status quo, so that every future occurrence of an obscured ad condition will result in the generation of the obscured ad nag display; and  
switch the operating mode of the software from a first operating mode to a second operating mode, wherein the second operating mode has less features than the first operating mode.

51. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an installer function for installing the software on a computer-readable storage medium.

52. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an installer function for installing the software on the client device.

53. The software as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising an installer function for installing the software on a computer-readable storage medium associated with the client device.

54. The software as set forth in Claim 19, further comprising an installer function for installing the software on a computer-readable storage medium.

2 55. The software as set forth in Claim 19, further comprising an installer function for  
installing the software on the client device.

2 56. The software as set forth in Claim 19, further comprising an installer function for  
installing the software on a computer-readable storage medium associated with the client  
4 device.